

How to Conduct Parent-Teacher Conferences

The parent conference is an important part of the overall communication plan with parents. It recognizes *that everyone is in this together*. It is a scheduled and formal effort to ensure that the child's and family's experience is satisfactory, that the child's profile is updated collaboratively, and that goals are developed for the upcoming months. While parents should be encouraged to request a meeting with the primary caregiver at any time, the primary caregiver should invite parents to a conference at least twice during the year (three to four times for infants and toddlers), especially during the period when the child is making the transition to a new group.

It is important that the conference truly be a discussion, not just a report by staff to parents. Conferences are a coming together to share observations and perspectives and to create an accurate picture of the child's development. The tone of the conference should be friendly, relaxed, and informal; staff should communicate caring and compassion for the child and respect for the parents and family.

Aims of the Conference

- A shared picture of the child's, family's, and teacher's experience
- A shared picture of the child's development
- A shared vision for the future
- Mutual respect and trust

Goals for the conference

- The parent should feel positive about the child and the child's experience in the program.
- The whole child should be brought into focus: the parents should feel informed about the child's experience and behavior at the center, and the teacher should feel informed about the child's behavior and experience at home.
- The parents should understand why teachers are doing what they do and the cooperation staff need from them.
- The center should understand and appreciate the parents' ideas, feelings, and ways of doing things and the cooperation parents need from staff.
- Any questions or concerns that parents or program staff have should be addressed, and possible changes in the program and its routines should be discussed.
- The relationship and good feelings between parents and staff should be reinforced.

Content of the Conference
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The child's and family's experience in the program• The personal care plan• The portfolio• The developmental profile• Child's and family's goals

Focus of the Conference

The parent-staff conference is an opportunity to discuss the child's and the family's experience in the program. It is a time to share information, deepen the relationship between parents and staff, discuss concerns that parents or staff might have, and, most of all, to appreciate the child. It is also an occasion to recognize the efforts of both parents and staff on behalf of the child. It is important that a conference not be viewed simply as a progress report or a developmental assessment because:

- Development is a journey, not a race. Children benefit from the individual, measured pace of the journey, not from achieving developmental milestones at the earliest opportunity.
- Development is a qualitative, integrated process, not simply the amassing of experience. Children benefit from both the richness and the depth of experience, not merely the quantity.
- Development occurs in a context of family and cultural values. What is important and what is deemed harmful for a child are individual family decisions.

The educational goals of a high-quality child development center are not to speed up development but to

- provide a relaxed, fun, secure caring and learning environment for each child
- broaden and deepen a child's learning by providing new and familiar experiences that challenge the child in all areas of development: motor, cognitive, perceptual, social, emotional, language, and expressive capabilities
- promote a sense of self-esteem and self-confidence as a competent, capable, active learner and member of a family and community
- promote those understandings, dispositions, and skills that lead to success in future schooling and life.

Conference Activities

During the conference:

- Have the child's *Individual Personal-Care Plan for Infants and Toddlers*, developmental profile, portfolio, and last *Parent-Staff Conference: Report Form* available.
- Discuss the items in the child's *Infant or Toddler Daily Experience Sheet* using the child's portfolio and the *Parent-Staff Conference: Report Form* as guides. Include the current goals for the child and the child's *Individual Personal-Care Plan for Infants and Toddlers*.
- After discussing the items and updating the Individual Personal-Care Plan for Infants and Toddlers, discuss and update the child development profile.
- Discuss and complete the *Parent-Staff Conference: Report Form*.